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RUEHJA/ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0430
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 1341
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000406

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SUBJECT: MORE ACTIVITY IN INDONESIA ON MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

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Classified By: Political Officer Catherine E. Sweet, Reasons 1.4(b)
and (d)

11. (S) Summary. The Middle East continues to be a hot topic in Indonesia, both within the government and civil society. On the Israel-Palestine conflict, the GOI has condemned Israel's excavations at the base of the al-Aqsa mosque. The GOI has also congratulated the Palestinian Authority for agreeing to a unity government, which the Indonesians hope will help the peace process move ahead more smoothly. At the same time, an Israeli government delegation will reportedly visit Indonesia at month's end for two days of secret consultations with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) spokesman, the Minister of Fisheries, and the Minister of Disadvantaged Regions. On Iran, Din Syamsuddin, the chairman of Indonesia's second largest Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, told the media that Muhammadiyah supports Iran's nuclear program and would urge the GOI to block any punitive anti-Iran UN Security Council resolutions. Finally, the head of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is in Indonesia to inaugurate OIC projects in the disaster-stricken regions of Bantul and Aceh and to discuss the ongoing crises in Iraq, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, and the southern Philippines. End summary.

GOI Condemns Excavation Work at al-Aqsa Mosque

12. (U) The Government of Indonesia issued a formal statement on February 12 that "condemns Israel for ignoring calls from the international community to halt excavations in the area of the al-Aqsa mosque." According to the statement, "the excavation will only lead to renewed tension in the Middle East and may pose a threat to international peace and security." Consequently, the GOI has become party to a joint Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)/Arab League/Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) demarche to the UN Secretary General and the Security Council. Along with these organizations, Indonesia intends to raise the excavation issue in the Security Council.

13. (U) The GOI declaration follows a February 9 press conference held by Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda, in which he called on Israel to halt its controversial excavation project. Wirajuda said that "we urge Israel to stop the excavation work because not only does the work have the potential to damage the mosque, which is highly revered by

Muslims, but it will also heighten tensions and complicate efforts to revive the peace process in the region." This new point of conflict has received substantial coverage in the media, and has been criticized by Muslim civil society groups in particular. The chairman of Indonesia's second largest Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, for one, publicly condemned Israel's actions and urged the Israelis to stop digging.

14. (U) Separately, Wirajuda addressed the Mecca agreement between Hamas and Fatah, saying that the GOI had congratulated the Palestinian authority, "especially Hamas, which succeeded in forming a unity government. We hope that the process of dialogue and peace with Israel will move forward better than before."

Government of Israel Delegation Visiting Indonesia

15. (S) A contact in President Yudhoyono's office told us that a delegation of three Israelis, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Director General Aharon Amramovitch, MFA Southeast Asia Bureau Director Giora Becher, and Israeli Ambassador to Singapore Ilan Ben-Dov, will be visiting Jakarta February 21 - 22. The Israelis are planning to meet with only three people: Presidential Spokesman Dino Patti Djalal, Minister of Fisheries Freddy Numberi, and Minister of Disadvantaged Regions Syaifullah Yusuf. (Note. In a November 2006 meeting, Ambassador Ben Dov asked for suggested areas where Israel might focus on assistance. Ambassador Pascoe suggested the Israelis might start with programs in some of the poorer islands where the population is predominantly Christian. He suggested sharing Israel's expertise in managing arid areas, which could be useful for developing islands like Flores. Meeting with the Ministers of Fisheries and Disadvantaged Regions makes sense in this

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light. End note.) SBY's special advisor, T.B. Silalahi, is handling all arrangements for the visit, which is extremely close hold on the Indonesian side (according to Silalahi's assistant, only SBY, Silalahi, and MFA Director General Cotan -- who secured the Israelis' visas -- know about the trip). When asked if SBY had endorsed the concept of the visit, Silalahi's assistant said only that SBY "was aware of it." She affirmed that that SBY would be keeping his distance from the details of the visit as a way of giving him some political cover in case the visit is leaked to the press.

Muhammadiyah Chairman Supports Iranian Nuclear Program

16. (U) On February 8, following a meeting with Iran's ambassador to Indonesia, Muhammadiyah Chairman Din Syamsuddin told the media that "We (Muhammadiyah) fully support the Iranian nuclear program, and we hope it will be able to continue to resist pressure from the U.S." Continued Din, "As we believe the Iranian nuclear program is for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of the Iranian people, it is a basic right of a country to find ways to improve its people's welfare." Din also told the media that he had pressed this point with the Government of Indonesia, calling on it to vote against punitive UN Security Council resolutions aimed at Iran. Syamsuddin's remarks are not terribly surprising: during his May 2006 state visit to Indonesia, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad received an enthusiastic reception during his calls on Muhammadiyah and Nadhlatul Ulama (NU) headquarters. Although Syamsuddin claimed to be speaking on behalf of Muhammadiyah, a member of Muhammadiyah's International Relations Committee told us the organization has never officially discussed the Iranian nuclear situation. This fine distinction, however, is likely to be lost on most.

OIC Secretary General Ihsanoglu Meets SBY

17. (U) OIC Secretary General Ekmeladdin Ihsanoglu has just visited Indonesia. Ihsanoglu inaugurated the "OIC Village," a new housing compound built under OIC auspices in Bantul (Yogyakarta), the region heavily damaged during last year's devastating earthquake, and launched a second humanitarian project in Aceh to provide long-term assistance to children orphaned by the 2005 tsunami. During his meeting with SBY on February 12, Ihsanoglu reportedly also discussed the ongoing crises in Iraq, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, and the southern Philippines, and requested that Indonesia play a constructive role on the Security Council in resolving these matters.

PASCOE